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## INTERVENTION AND THE MEXICAN PROBLEM

*By Enoch F. Bell, Associate Secretary of the American Board  
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Various forces seem to be combining to bring about American armed intervention in Mexico. Some of them, though unintentionally so, are Mexican; some are American. Among the former might be placed a new Mexican nationalism expressed in certain constitutional "reforms" which tend to cause serious clash with old-time international laws and customs; second, such an inadequate governmental control of all Mexico as to allow the abuses of banditry; and thirdly a certain obstinate insistence upon governmental position that irritates other governments. These tend to work against the fullest understanding on our part of Mexico's mind and motives. It is only when we go in person below the border that we realize how little there is of anti-American zeal and how much more friendliness appears than we dreamed possible.

The forces operating in America for intervention include pride, pity and "propaganda"—and the greatest of these is propaganda. For some time this has been the most potent means of "educating America to its duty." Present day developments like the Big Bend ransom affair pique our pride and cause us to see red—particularly if we have been suffering such pin pricks for some time. Our pity too is often aroused when we think of what that country might be and is not. Yet most of the American people would settle things in a friendly though firm way if these propaganda bees would stop buzzing.

It is this anti-Mexican publicity work that keeps the friends of international peace on the anxious seat. President Carranza and his government have long been troubled by it. They have tried to offset it with publications of their own here and in Mexico. They are always alluding to

it. The *Democrata* of Mexico City for example publishes today a statement by the sub-secretary of the department of industry, commerce and labor:

The outcry of a certain American press is designed expressly to influence our (Mexican) legislation and public men, so as to bring about a change in the forms incorporated in our present legislation which fails to satisfy the conditions of monopoly and privilege to which certain American companies are aspiring.

As for the United States, we have been indoctrinated for some time. Last April *The Nation* in an editorial said:

There is reason to believe that efforts of serious proportion are being made to bring about war between the United States and Mexico. Bit by bit the propaganda is being spread. Leading American and Canadian oil men go to Paris—the former after an unseemly controversy with the state department. In Paris these gentlemen meet with the other oil groups. Suddenly it is announced from the library of J. P. Morgan that a committee of ten Americans, five British and five French bankers has been formed to protect the interests of foreign investors in Mexico, etc., etc. . . . A drive is on. President Carranza is to be labelled pro-German and his régime is apparently to fall into the category of Bolshevism. Law and order, property rights, the church and the old constitution are all to be invoked. Foreign recognition is to be secured and the public opinion in America is to be whipped into favor of intervention. . . . The oil magnates and their banking committee understand precisely the nature of the instrument which they are playing on.

Some days ago the writer received from an American authority on things Mexican the following letter:

Intervention is coming just as fast as certain interests can possibly force it. I have just returned from a meeting called by the League of Free Nations Association to discuss what should be done to stop what seems to be inevitable—armed intervention. The revelations made concerning the amount of money being spent by the oil interests to manufacture propaganda in favor of intervention are simply appalling. While I have had evidence of this propaganda for some time, I had no conception of its enormity until the facts were laid before me. I am told that the oil men are playing not simply for the oil wells of Tampico and Vera Cruz, but for a much larger stake, that they have found out that Mexico is full of oil; that while they admit that Carranza so far has not confiscated their properties and has promised not to do so, what they want is the United States to get hold of Mexico so that they can easily obtain those billions of dollars worth of oil

properties which are certain to be developed in the future. When the country here has been worked up a little more then it will be easy to pull off a few bandit raids and inflame the people of the United States to such an extent that we shall be swept into war before we know it.

“Uncle Dudley” of the *Boston Globe* in one of his best editorials (August 22) on the question of a war with Mexico refers to certain people “not in contact with the grindstone of life” who are as anxious for armed intervention as we are to avoid it. He writes:

Their motives and their propaganda are evident. And since congress is so fond of investigating it might profitably inquire whether there is any connection between this group on our side of the border and the disorders on the other side of it.

So much for quotations and for the forces operating to bring us into war with our neighbor on the south. Suffice it to say that the situation is most serious. We must all of us awake to the significance of the hour. The time has passed for thoughtless acquiescence. America needs to take firm hold upon the question. We must know what we are being led into—and refuse to be led there.

There seem to be two alleged reasons for armed intervention: America’s rights and Mexico’s needs. To preserve the property and other material privileges secured under the Diaz regime, and above all to safeguard the lives of Americans allowed to enter Mexico and live there for business purposes it is to be expected that Mexico will live up to the rules and practices of all civilized nations. Yet Mexico has such a habit of revolution that no government has been able to prevent loss of American property and life. There was, however, but little talk or thought of war until the Carranza government set out to create a constitutional law nationalizing the oil as well as other natural resources of Mexico—a socialistic if not bolshevistic move against the long accepted rules and regulations of international understanding. This produced a question of far reaching moment which the governments of the various foreign investors concerned apparently have not intended to recognize, and which the American owners would naturally like

changed. One can sympathize with the foreign interests in this matter and with the governments involved without believing for a moment that America would have any right to intervene by force of arms—that is, to the extent of setting up a new government for the people of Mexico which would amend the constitution to suit the purposes of outside nations. No such interpretation of the Monroe Doctrine would stand inspection by a Pan-American Commission or justify us in objecting to Japan's doing what she wished with China. Nor would any League of Nations long exist if such a fundamental principle of self-determination were violated by the very nation which has taken the lead in this Big Brother defense of the rights of the smaller nations. Armed intervention for property purposes is—with us at least—an outworn creed. It doesn't pay. There are other and better ways of getting our property protected in Mexico. These we must continue to work for with the patience born of a complete understanding of the necessary slowness of progress in Mexico toward full law and order.

As for protecting life, that is a much more serious matter. Scores of Americans through no fault of their own have been caught in the cataclysm of revolution. It will not satisfy the American people to say that Mexico is sorry and that every amend possible will be made. It does not do either to criticize the system which compels our government to demand satisfaction for the death of its citizens in Mexico even if said citizens took all the initiative in entering Mexico and went into the most dangerous situations of their own accord. Just now nothing will satisfy the people but a proof that Mexico can protect our citizens within her borders. This is quite another thing, however, from saying that to avenge the loss of 200 Americans we were justified in exposing to death 200,000 of our own boys; or in killing off many hundreds if not thousands of Mexicans who had nothing to do with the murder of our own.

The problem, it is true, as someone has said, is how to protect American lives and incidentally American property in Mexico without destroying by war a hundred times as much life and property as we set out to protect—"hitherto

the traditional lunacy of governments." But let us beware of the fallacy that by resorting to war with our weaker neighbor we shall in the end best preserve our rights. If we are to be "fools" let us err on the side of patience.

The other fundamental reason alleged for intervention is Mexico's needs. The most subtle advocates of our policing Mexico base their most telling plea upon the condition of the poor peon after centuries of abuse and the necessity of our giving him a chance to get back to his own. They ask that America, the great friend of the oppressed the world over, should "clean up Mexico" and "put it to rights." There is no doubt that the Anglo-Saxon thinks he could make Mexico worth while. I suppose too that he would welcome a chance to try. Possibly too the advocates of armed intervention might convince some that by the use of force upon a proud and unwilling people in a volcanic land we could lay lasting foundations for peace and prosperity for the poor peon, but most of us would refer to Germany and her Alsatian difficulties. Many too would be convinced of the divine wisdom of the One who centuries ago recognized the folly of a conquest by the sword in order to gain a hearty universal reception of His culture. No, Anglo-Saxons may be willing to die in defense of democracy among all peoples, but they are not fools enough to try to shoot those democratic ideals and practices into a race subdued for the purpose.

Mexico's needs cannot be met by force intervention. Nor can her fundamental problems be solved by foreign swords. Not even if we went in with the purest altruistic purpose possible. Even if we should so subjugate Mexico that she would be compelled in the most inaccessible mountain fastnesses and unto the utmost limits of the land to accept our system of government, industry, commerce and finance; even if we imposed our education upon the poorest peon for a generation or two—and nothing short of fifty years of forced occupancy could approach the requirements of such benevolent intervention—we would still be suffering the condemnation of all Kulturites and still have the problem on our hands. Cortez and his crew began it four hundred

years ago. They made their conquest as thorough as we could make ours. They even had the mighty assistance of the Church which introduced great educational and economic improvements, helped develop the vast mineral and agricultural resources of the land, and purified the religious ideals of the Indian masses. Nevertheless matters went from bad to worse while the foreigners appropriated the land, sucked out the silver and gold, and reduced the masses to slavery. The result was rebellion against foreign exploitation, and the expulsion—though temporary—of the foreigners.

In the Forties America took a hand. She intervened by armed force when Texas and Tyler schemed. We won glory—and gold. We got California. We lost, however, what power of reform within Mexico we possessed in virtue of our own struggles against outside interference with our liberties. Mexico began to doubt us then and she has had reason to continue to do so since. We are not any too proud of our record. To be sure we compelled the Mexican to respect the Texan ranger, and we saved enough good land from the hand of the "lazy peon" to sustain some of the finest Anglo-Saxon civilization America can ever boast of. We can never forget, however, that we took all this away from Mexico by force of arms and that even a small payment of money could never serve to salve our conscience. If any country owed Mexico a debt of good will it was our own. Our armed intervention of 1848 aggravated rather than alleviated Mexico's real troubles. Indeed it has made it much harder for us to help Mexico at this juncture.

Some ten years later England, France and Spain, because of certain losses in men and money, decided upon armed intervention in Mexico. The fleets appeared off the coast; the ultimatum was delivered. The French army entered and took control. To cement the authority over a people too weak to run themselves a king was given them—a foreigner—and every effort possible was made to reconcile the Mexicans to a system calculated to prove their ultimate salvation. But somehow the old fear of foreign exploitation flared up once more. The different factions united against the foreigner, and out the foreigner went. They even shot

the "emperor." Nationalism, through this armed intervention of foreigners, was revived; and somehow the real problem was no nearer solution than before.

After that there came an intervention of another sort—an economic invasion largely from America. This too was "armed" in the sense that it compelled Mexico by "concessions" to surrender outright great sources of natural wealth. Diaz felt obliged to devote an exaggerated proportion of attention to making Mexico attractive to outside capital, but in doing this he failed to give sustained attention to the real and abiding needs of the people. To be sure Diaz's government was as avowedly paternal as ours would be. Yet becoming more and more personal and less paternal, it played into the hands of capital, foreign as well as domestic. The result was the usual one for Mexico: rebellion, revolution and another state of chaos crying out for some saner treatment than had thus far been tried.

We can never hope to solve the Mexican problem by force of arms against her will. What the Mexicans need is to be disarmed—disarmed of the suspicion of us and our motives that have possessed them for so long. This must be done by some proof of our genuine friendship and our true desire to coöperate with Mexico in her development. If by going into Mexico with the slogan "Mexico for the Mexicans" we could loan our forces with the consent of the Mexicans we would be infinitely better off than if we went to war to preserve our dignity or to settle Mexico until she could settle with us. Under such coöperative plan we would be invited to do a thorough job of it. The longer we remained with an altruistic motive the better would we be known and perhaps liked. We could remain until democracy and self-government got into the very blood of the masses, and until the nation was full of such Mexicans of intelligence and integrity as many of us have met. Under such circumstances we would not be asked to leave as we practically were in the Philippines. Nor would our term of occupancy or our methods of administration in Mexico be subject to the whims and follies of our party platforms at home. There would be no leaving when politics entered.



We could make this task a civil service undertaking behind which each administration would throw the prestige and power of its position, outvying even its predecessor in largeness of plan and lavishness of expenditure.

But what a dream! What Mexican would suggest an American mandatory! And what American would dare guarantee such perfectly sustained altruism! No, rather must we assume that if we enter Mexico by force "to clean her up" we shall intensify her suspicion of us and close her heart—and that of Latin-America generally—to our approaches. There is no better way of losing what leadership we have from the border to the Straits than by armed intervention in Mexico.

Some months ago three Mexican Catholic archbishops made a statement to the American press of great significance. Someone has called it one of the great documents of the day. The archbishops after a great deal of persecution on the part of the revolutionists had been exiled from their homeland. They had other causes for grievance against the Carranza government. Almost every reason was theirs, humanly speaking, for favoring the overthrow of the present constitutional party. Moreover, by remaining silent they could have given their support to the attitude generally taken by Catholics here against Carranza. Nevertheless, they refused to lend their moral support to any movement fostering American and foreign intervention in Mexico. On the contrary they came out boldly for peace. They knew their own people and what the effect of intervention would be upon them. Though exiled, they still remained identified with Mexico and championed what they considered to be Mexico's best interests and ours. Note their words:

We desire that wise counsel should displace all thoughts of violence in the consideration of such differences as exist, or as may be created, between our dear land of Mexico and the land of our refuge. Between lands linked in a common destiny by nature and by sentiment, free lands intended by God to help each other in harmony, mutual confidence, and disinterested friendship, in the fulfilment of the high purposes for which He has created them, the peace of God should prevail. . . . We would give testimony of our abiding faith in the essential justice of the Mexican people,

and our unalterable trust in the ultimate triumph of all just causes placed before the tribunal of our people. Shall we appear in vain to the fair-minded moulders of American opinion that they refrain from thoughts of violence and instruct their public in the ways of charity, and of peaceful settlement of all difficulties? We appeal especially to those in the United States who in good faith have made our cause their own, reminding them that the temples of God are the hearts of His people, and that the mission of His Church is to create peace and good will among men.

### THE PROBLEM

This fundamental problem of Mexico is the development of self-governing sense and stability within the masses. When the people get to thinking and become conscious of their power no more problem will there be for us or for Mexico. Until such is accomplished there will be trouble, and no matter how many interventions there may be or how many revolutions, until the people have become educated to the function of self-government the problem will be one for them and for us to consider.

This problem which the most thoughtful and patriotic Mexicans face is such that only generations of patient and persistent effort can solve. You will recall the words of President Lincoln when he was urged to intervene by force of arms in Mexico:

The system (republican) everywhere has to make its way painfully through difficulties and embarrassments which result from the action of antagonistic elements, a legacy of former times and of very different institutions. Such states are entitled to greater forbearance and more generous sympathies from the United States.

That problem will be solved by the Mexicans themselves, give them time and support enough.

To bring this about, namely, the development of a self-governing people, many sound steps have already been taken by the Mexican people and many more will be taken if they are let alone. No government has ever faced greater difficulties than the present one. Perhaps some will say that they made the one great mistake of changing the constitution in such a way as to attempt to deprive foreign inter-

ests of their property. This certainly has been at the root of many of Carranza's difficulties. At the same time, progress has been made. Indeed, it looks now as if the Mexican constitution itself would soon be amended to remove the cause of so much international trouble, and to make possible the attraction of large foreign capital.

On the whole the political and social movement since the days of Diaz has been fundamentally a sound one. This statement can be maintained notwithstanding the many imperfections in government and the unbearable abuse of power by some civil and military authorities and in spite of a pathetic lack of a trained, reliable body politic. The movement since Diaz's day tends to free the common people from age-long tyranny and exploitation exerted through church and state; and to awaken the common people to a consciousness of their rights and power. The people of Mexico deserve and need the moral support of all lovers of liberty, enlightenment and social uplift. Such support, however, should persist in prolonged patience no matter what the political vicissitudes may be from time to time.

But to solve the Mexican problem the great need is that of all countries struggling into self-government, namely: a nation of men and women of staunch character and unselfish patriotism. This need is greater even than economic development under just and strict governmental protection. Mexico needs *men*—men with

Strong minds, great hearts, true faith and willing hands;  
Men whom the lust of office does not kill;  
Men whom the spoils of office cannot buy;  
Men who possess opinions and a will;  
Men who have honor; men who will not lie.  
Tall men, uncrowned, who live above the fog  
In public duty and private thinking.

This can be said without casting reflections upon the fine men in Mexico (and in exile) who in the years past have done so much to bring honor upon the Mexican name and in whose hands rests the leadership required for these great days.

## AMERICA'S PART

Now there is much that America can do instead of going to war with Mexico. If done in the spirit of coöperative construction, we can do our share toward providing the stability and security required. Many of us, for example, can visit the field and see for ourselves. Our impressions will be as good as those received by the San Antonio business men a little while ago. We shall produce points of contact that will tend toward a better understanding between the nations. We shall come in touch with the people themselves, know them better, and give them better impressions of America than they have perhaps received in times past.

Secondly, we can study their language and their literature, thus getting into their mind and history. There is nothing outside of personal contact that would give us a better understanding of the Mexicans. Ethnologically we are quite different. They have their peculiar racial temper and temperament. It is not untrue to say that they are "Oriental" while we are "Anglo-Saxon." Through their language too we would understand how historically they have suffered from European arrogance and exploitation. We would get into the great realm of religion too and understand how it is that the Church has ceased to function as a great ethical force for the freeing of the common people. A knowledge of the Mexican language and literature along with travel would open many a mind to the situation.

Third, we should take the attitude of believing in the Mexicans as a people. We may distrust their governments, but not the people. Perhaps we have allowed the acts of government to color our view of the people. This must cease. We must go deeper. We must trust this present day movement and see to it that our moral support is given in such a way that there shall not be any of the old-time compromise with those powers of autocracy and tyranny which always tend to deprive the people of their rights. We must believe in the moral capacity of the Mexican whether he be a Mestizo or a pure-blooded Indian. The

writer well remembers watching a basket ball game at Guadalajara a few months ago. He was accompanied by a former basket ball player from Yale and a man from Harvard. Both these men spoke in highest terms of the skill of the Mexican players, and all agreed that the young men kept their tempers and showed as much self-control in defeat as well as in victory as could be found in similar circles in America. This showed capacity for self-government.

Fourthly, we might fall in line with the plan of the Mexican government to have more Americans encouraged to enter Mexico to settle there as citizens of the country. While at first thought this might seem an impracticable plan, yet it is one that ought to be seriously considered. One reason why Germans, Spanish and other European peoples have such a hold upon the people of Mexico is because they are willing to identify themselves with the communities in which they live. Surely men from America, as from Canada and Europe, would bring a tremendous amount of stability to the people of Mexico through this form of sacrifice. Incidentally such immigrants would have opportunities of money making that they could not have in other lands owing to the natural wealth of the country.

Fifth, we could assist in the educational work of Mexico. This of course would be the most far-reaching way of assisting our neighbor on the South to develop the life and character demanded for the new day. Under the present government American men and women of great wealth could do much along lines of providing teachers for private and public schools, could erect hospitals and run them freely, could support large social service enterprises, and could flood the country with up-to-date, high-toned and thoroughly Christian literature.

Sixth, last but by no means least, let us attract young Mexican men and women to America for educational purposes, treat them as they well deserve, and send them back not only good friends of America but of every cause that is good and enduring.

As a Mexican exile says, "this talk of intervention should give way to plans for mutual helpfulness." Why there-

fore may we not keep the fundamentals in mind and prove our good will to the Mexican people through the only kind of coöperation that makes for peace? This is not inconsistent with a firm insistence that Mexico will fulfill her international obligations.